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Mina (Margery) Crandon (1888-1941)

Mina Stinson was born and grew up in Ontario, Canada. Her closest family tie was that of her older brother "Walter" who was killed in a train crash accident in 1911. Walter's association with his sister continued after his death when he became her control during physical mediumship sésances.

At 17 Mina moved to Boston where she married. The marriage failed after a short time and she met Dr. LeRoi Godard Crandon, a successful Boston surgeon whom she married in 1918. (Dr. Crandon's family dates back to the Mayflower.) They purchased a house at No 11 Lime Street, on Beacon Hill and became well established in Boston Society. The Crandon's were the perfect Beacon Hill upper class couple. Dr. Crandon was an instructor at Harvard Medical School, and Mina was thought to be piquant, witty and too good looking for her own good.

It was in 1923 when Dr. Crandon became interested in Spiritualism and psychic research, so in May of that year he gathered some friends around and decided to try a table tilting séance. Following Dr. Crandon's terse instructions the sitters took their place at the table and joined hands and waited some time for some indication of spirit presence. When nothing happened, Mina began to feel silly, and couldn't help laughing at the other sitters who all looked so solemn about it. They reproved her severely and her husband informed her that 'This is a serious matter.' Then, abruptly the table began to move, slightly at first, but then more violently, tilting up on two legs before crashing loudly to the floor. Dr. Crandon demanded to know which of his guests possessed the mediumistic talent necessary to cause this manifestation. One by one Dr. Crandon instructed his guests to remove their hands from the table. The table stopped its rocking only when the last sitter lifted her hands. Dr. Crandon had his answer; the medium was his own wife Mina.

It was only a few months later that the control identified himself as 'Walter Stinson', Mina's dead brother. It wasn't long before Walter was able to entrance

Mina and speak directly through her. Again it wasn't long before he had mastered the ability to build a voice box after which he addressed the proceeding in the direct voice process.

Walter, it was discovered was not the traditionally spiritually-minded personality and often his language was somewhat colourful. During one séance a sitter asked of him 'Is this the language of the fourth dimension?' To which Walter retorted 'No, I am talking in a language for you to understand.' Walter believed his mission was to demonstrate, through his sister, the creative process of the mind, via telekinetic effects, rather than deliver inspirational messages or addresses. In this respect he excelled.

Mina's mediumship developed rapidly, involving complete levitation of tables in red light and then in rapid succession all forms of physical phenomenon occurred. It wasn't long before the word got out about Mina's mediumship which was followed very quickly by the attention of the researches. Attendance at her séances became by invitation only.

In 1923, only months after she had first started sitting for development, she underwent her first formal investigation of her mediumship. This was conducted by a committee from Harvard and arranged by Professor William McDougal, head of Harvard's Department of Psychology. The committee put Mrs Crandon through intense observation and experimentation, hoping to verify either the validity or the fraudulence of her mediumship. After five months of observation the committee in their wisdom, decided that a 'majority' of the telekinetic phenomena was fraudulently produced, but made no formal opinion on the trance utterances associated with her mediumship.

Believing his wife to be a remarkable psychic instrument, Dr. Crandon took her abroad to build a consensus of favourable opinion from European experts. One of these experts was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who declared her be a very powerful medium, and that the validity of her gifts was beyond question.

In December 1922, the *Scientific American* magazine launched an investigation into the paranormal and was offering a \$2,500 prize to anyone who could provide conclusive evidence of any paranormal physical phenomena. This was a challenge to their conservative yet daring personalities and an opportunity to test Mina's metal against the notorious Houdini. They didn't need the money, but hoped to gain the approval of such a prestigious group of people and at Houdini's expense. The temptation proved to great to resist and the Crandon's decided to enter the contest. Dr Crandon even wrote to Conan Doyle of his willingness to "Crucify" any investigators who doubted his wife. Even the discarnate Walter speaking from the spirit plane, appeared to relish the challenge

The judging committee was to be comprised of: Dr. Walter F. Prince, Hereward McDougal and Harry Houdini, the famous escapologist. The secretary of the

committee was J. Malcolm Bird editor of the magazine. It was Bird who adopted the Margery pseudonym to protect her from publicity, and unnecessary attention to the distinguished Dr. Crandon. It was under this name that her renown steadily grew. Bird was also shared the opinion of Conan Doyle, and wrote a series of articles extolling Mina's gifts.

The official sittings began in January, 1924 under the direct supervision of Dr. Crandon. The control conditions of the séance room were produced at just about every sitting, but the committee wanted to exert even more control over the proceedings, to be absolutely sure that there was no fraud, even though no agreement was made with Dr. Crandon.

Houdini, was not notified by the *Scientific American* that the committee had begun its investigations, it was three months later that he learned of their commencement and by this time rumour had it that the committee were about to declare Margery genuine and awarding her the prize. Bird, in particular, was eager to give the magazine's endorsement and allowed words of a favourable finding to find its way to the press. "Boston Medium Baffles Experts," announced one headline. "Houdini the Magician Stumped," declared another.

Houdini was furious; he had not even been present at the investigation, much less stumped. He told the *Scientific American*, that he would forfeit \$1,000 of his own money if he failed to expose Margery as a fraud. Travelling to Boston he reviewed the findings of his peers, and to his way of thinking the whole investigation had been mishandled from the beginning. Most of the committee had availed themselves of the Crandon's generous hospitality during the proceedings, staying in their home, eating their food and enjoying their company. As far as Houdini was concerned, this had compromised their objectivity. Later it was revealed that accepting room and board was the least of their transgressions. One investigator is believed to have borrowed money from Dr. Crandon, while another hoped to win his backing for a research foundation. Worse yet, this distinguished panel a men were not unaware of Mrs Crandon's attractions. At least one committee member drew comfort in his old age from the recollection of amorous encounters with the celebrated medium.

Houdini constructed a cabinet with steel bolts and padlocks. Houdini defied her to produce any paranormal phenomena. The cabinet was hot, cramped and stuffy; but Margery agreed to sit in it for a séance (against the advice and wishes of her husband). On this occasion no telekinetic effects were produced, and Walter accused Houdini of planting something in the cabinet in order to frame Margery. A heated argument ensued, and Walter blurting out, "Houdini...get...out of her and never come back! If you don't, I will!"

The séance ended and after the cabinet was opened, a collapsible ruler was discovered beneath the floor. Houdini accused Margery of using the ruler with her mouth in order to produce the telekinetic effects which would have normally

been produced. Harry Houdini had apparently exposed Margery as a fraud, or so it seemed from 1924 until 1959, when William Lindsay Gresham published a book which included an account of that evening:

“Years later, when the self liberator (Houdini) was dead, Jim Collins (Houdini’s Assistant) was asked about the mysterious ruler. Collins smiled wryly. “I chucked it in the box meself. The boss told me to do it. He wanted to fix her good.”

Fact or fiction? The only one’s that can answer that is Harry Houdini and Jim Collins.

Never the less Margery’s mediumship went on with a diversity of phenomena taking place. This ranged from psychic breezes, raps, trance, trance writings and in several different languages to materialisations, independent voice communication, apportations and the production of paraffin gloves and fingerprints. This last piece of phenomenon was to end up as the final death blow to the mediumship of Margery, when it was discovered that a thumb print, allegedly produced by Walter, was an identical print of a Boston Dentist, Dr. Frederick Caldwell. This revelation was brought about when Dr. Caldwell admitted to giving Margery a piece of wax which his own print had been pressed.

Mina Margery Crandon was probably the most tested medium of the 1920’s. Tested by people who new little or nothing of the intricacies’ of Physical Mediumship, people who new little about the sensitivity of the person let alone the ‘medium’. Of all the people in the world at that time to have been investigated by, who could choose a worse person than Harry Houdini, a man who openly detested spiritualism and mediumship in any form. A man who had had his pride hurt and his reputation tarnished. This is a man who wanted to prove fraud, even if it meant that he concocted the fraud himself. This is a man who had few scruples, and who fooled himself into believing that he could conduct a dispassionate investigation. This was a determined man who was set on destroying the reputation of Margery Crandon.

Only you the reader can make that ultimate decision as to whether you believe that Mina ‘Margery’ Crandon was a fake or a true physical medium.

Walter Stinson now works as a control of Stewart Alexander. He no longer uses his colourful language, in public at least, and to my knowledge never speaks of those bad days around such sceptics as Houdini, whilst working with his sister.

Mina on the other hand, is reported as saying that she will never return and speak through a medium or return to the earth plane, as a guide or helper because of the treatment that she received during her mediumship. ‘Time can be a great healer.’ We hope!

